SOCCER MOMS, WELFARE QUEENS, WAITRESS MOMS, AND SUPER MOMS: MYTHS OF MOTHERHOOD IN STATE MEDIA COVERAGE OF CHILD CARE DURING THE "WELFARE REFORMS" OF THE 1990s

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Throughout the evolution of American social policy, political debates surrounding child care have centered on competing maternal ideals—making mothers the primary target population for policy in this area. The construction of the "deserving" mother in child care policy debates has changed over time depending on particular economic circumstances and cultural norms during each era. The competition among different constructions of mothers proved especially vigorous in the later decades of the twentieth century as evidenced by the media-driven "Mommy Wars" that dominated the policy debates of this era. Conflicting social, political, and cultural values continue to pit the stay-at-home "Soccer Mom" against the career-oriented "Super Mom." The mythical "Welfare Queen" and working poor "Waitress Mom," in contrast, are not even on the radar in this battle for the ideal construction of motherhood that persists into the current political climate. While pundits and scholars continue to debate the implications of various formulations of American motherhood, the majority of mothers are now working both outside and inside of their homes.

The provision of safe, affordable, high-quality child care could potentially serve as an incentive for peace in these raging ideological debates. Theoretically, at least, mothers and families across racial and class divisions hope to provide their children with the best possible care. In reality, debates about motherhood and child care continue to reflect

persistent cultural discord regarding issues of work, family, and gender. The absence of a coordinated national child care policy in the U.S. further complicates this public debate by sending mixed messages to women who differ in race, class, and family employment decisions. The 1996 welfare reforms,[1] however, did include a government child care program called the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) that focuses primarily on meeting the child care needs of mothers transitioning from welfare to work.[2] Importantly, though, this federal child care program continues to be administered by state governments.[3] The federal devolution of child care authority via this CCDF program allows each state to resolve the Mommy Wars over child care in its own way, as state governments continue to have unprecedented flexibility in deciding which groups of mothers to target for child care benefits. Therefore, we must understand child care debates (and, ultimately, the policies that emerge out of such debates) in the vocabularies through which state-level political actors conceptualize motherhood and child care.

This Article will explore, both theoretically and empirically, how myths of motherhood are constructed, reinforced, and debunked in the context of the contentious child care debates surrounding the passage and implementation of the CCDF provision of the 1996 welfare reform legislation. I will begin by providing an in-depth exploration of the multi-disciplinary scholarship on competing constructions of maternal myths in American society during this critical policy time period to flesh out the important cultural and political implications of such stereotypes. This Article will also present findings from a content analysis of state-level newspaper and television stories on motherhood and child care during the four years leading up to this major federal child care policy reform to provide concrete examples of how maternal myths are shaped by mass media outlets. Given the undeniable importance of the media in the policymaking process—primarily through its influence on popular opinion[4] and political elites[5]—this analysis of media coverage from the 1990s

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1 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-193 (1996).

2 42 U.S.C. § 9857 (2014).

3 *Id.*

4 *See* MICHAEL BRUCE MACKUEN & STEVEN LANE COOMBS, MORE THAN NEWS: MEDIA POWER IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS (1981);

Roy L. Behr & Shanto Iyengar, *Television News, Real-World Cues, and Changes in the Public Agenda*, 49 PUB. OPINION Q. 38 (1985);

Lutz Erbring et al., *Front-Page News and Real-World Cues: A New Look at Agenda-Setting by the Media*, 24 AM. J. POL. SCI. 16 (1980).

5 *See* BERNARD C. COHEN, THE PRESS AND FOREIGN POLICY (1963); MARTIN LINSKY, IMPACT: HOW THE PRESS AFFECTS FEDERAL POLICYMAKING (1986); PATRICK O'HEFFERNAN, MASS MEDIA AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: INSIDER PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL JOURNALISM AND THE FOREIGN POLICY PROCESS (1991); Fay Lomax Cook et al., *Media and Agenda Setting: Effects on the Public, Interest Group Leaders, Policy Makers, and Policy*, 47 PUB. OPINION Q. 16 (1983); Jarol B. Manheim & Robert B. Albritton, *Changing National Images: International Public Relations and Media Agenda Setting*, 78 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 641 (1984); Everett M. Rogers & James W. Dearing, *Agenda-Setting Research: Where it has Been, Where is it Going?*, 11 COMM. Y.B. 555 (1988).

provides important information about how the media constructs and translates the myths of motherhood that continue to shape political discussions of child care.

I.   MOTHERS AS "TARGETS" IN THE CHILD CARE DEBATE

When we debate child care policy in this country, we are simultaneously arguing about societal values concerning maternal employment and family structure. It is no coincidence, for instance, that the central public debate on American child care is often referred to as the "Mommy Wars."[6] While most pundits and scholars interpret this label as a battle between different groups of mothers (primarily between employed and full-time, stay-at-home mothers),[7] it can also be read as a war against *all* mothers, in that the false dichotomy between working and non-working mothers leaves nearly all groups of mothers feeling attacked and on the defensive.[8] This ongoing competition between different ideologies and mythologies of motherhood tends to degrade and minimize maternal choices about work, family, and child care.[9] Thus, while mothers as a group comprise the primary target for child care policy, mothers have also become the primary target for criticism and blame in the context of child care debates, regardless of their personal choices and constraints.[10] An important first step in reducing this counterproductive "motherblame" is to acknowledge and assess the competing myths of motherhood that continue to drive modern debates about American motherhood and child care.[11]

This Article will explore how such myths about different groups of mothers affect child care policy by using a variation of the political scientists Schneider and Ingram's target population framework.[12] For Schneider and Ingram, a society's conceptualization of policy target groups, coupled with the political power of these groups, are the most significant forces in how a public problem, and its corresponding policy design, are defined.[13] Their typology of target populations categorizes groups on two dimensions: how they are socially constructed and the amount of political power they are purported to have (see Figure 1).[14]

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6   *E.g.*, DIANE E. EYER, MOTHERGUILT: HOW OUR CULTURE BLAMES MOTHERS FOR WHAT'S WRONG WITH SOCIETY 107 (1996); SHARON HAYS, THE CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD (1996); MIRIAM PESKOWITZ, THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MOMMY WARS: WHO DECIDES WHAT MAKES A GOOD MOTHER? 5 (2005); SHARI L. THURER, THE MYTHS OF MOTHERHOOD: HOW CULTURE REINVENTS THE GOOD MOTHER 131-34 (1994).

7   EYER, *supra* note 6, at 107.

8   HAYS, *supra* note 6, at 132-33.

9   SUE LANCI VILLANI & JANE E. RYAN, MOTHERHOOD AT THE CROSSROADS: MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF A CHANGING ROLE 3 (1997).

10   *See* EYER, *supra* note 6.

11   *Id.* at 3.

12   Anne Schneider & Helen Ingram, *Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy*, 87 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 334, 335 (1993).

13   *Id.* at 338.

14   *Id.*

Schneider and Ingram define target populations as "stereotypes about particular groups of people that have been created by politics, culture, socialization, history, the media, literature, religion, and the like."[15] These images are highly malleable over time and because they both shape and reflect political and cultural values, target populations are a particularly important theoretical construct.

Figure 1. Schneider and Ingram's Target Population Typology[16]

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

		POSITIVE [DESERVING]	NEGATIVE [UNDESERVING]
POLITICAL POWER	*STRONGER*	***Advantaged*** The elderly Business Veterans Scientists The Middle Class	***Contenders*** The rich Big Unions Minorities Cultural Elites Moral Majority Savings & Loans CEOs
	WEAKER	***Dependents*** Children Mothers Disabled Native Americans The Poor	***Deviants*** Criminals Drug Addicts Communists Flag Burners Gangs The Homeless

In Schneider and Ingram's model, however, mothers and children as a group are placed in the "weak, yet deserving" category labeled "dependents."[17] Given the existence of cross-cutting cleavages of mothers—such as mothers who are middle class and therefore in the "advantaged" category or mothers receiving welfare who are often constructed as undeserving "deviants"—Schneider and Ingram's categorization of all mothers as "dependents" is overly broad. Consequently, my analysis will disaggregate mothers into four distinct groups to more accurately reflect the political and social status of American

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15   *Id.* at 335.
16   *Id.* at 336.
17   *Id.*

mothers. The four subgroups of mothers included in this study are: (1) welfare mothers, (2) working poor mothers, (3) middle to upper class working mothers, and (4) full-time stay-at-home mothers (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Target Populations of Mother Subgroups for Child Care Policy

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

|		DESERVING	UNDESERVING
POLITICAL POWER	*STRONGER*	*Advantaged* Middle to Upper Class "Soccer" Moms	*Contenders* Middle to Upper Class "Super" Career Moms
	WEAKER	*Dependents* Working Poor "Waitress" Moms	*Deviants* "Welfare Queen" Moms

To more vividly differentiate the four types of mothers in this analysis, I have also matched each target population with the socio-politically-constructed stereotype or myth most commonly associated with each subgroup of mother. These four stereotypes include "Soccer Moms," "Welfare Queens," "Waitress Moms," and "Super Moms," and will be discussed in depth below. Very little empirical work has been done to explore the content of these maternal stereotypes and yet, as Ganong and Coleman point out, "knowing the stereotypes about different types of mothers should allow policy makers to develop policies for mothers, children, and families that will be socially acceptable and workable within the context of American social values.[18]

These stereotypes of American mothers each developed at a specific time in our history, and yet have proven exceedingly resilient despite demographic and experiential evidence to the contrary. The image of a "June Cleaver" housewife in the 1950s continues to serve as the dominant myth of American motherhood even into the twenty-first century. This is particularly surprising since full-time motherhood is actually a historical

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18   Lawrence H. Ganong & Marilyn Coleman, *The Content of Mother Stereotypes*, 32 SEX ROLES 495, 497 (1995).

anomaly both across the globe and in American society.[19] Nevertheless, the June Cleaver image, with a few modifications along the way, has endured. In fact, a 1998 study by the Families and Work Institute found that 50% of married working mothers agreed that "it is much better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children."[20] Moreover, approximately 68% of respondents in a 1997 poll on child care agreed that the best family structure was one where a mother stays home to raise her children full time (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Perspectives on Mothers and Work
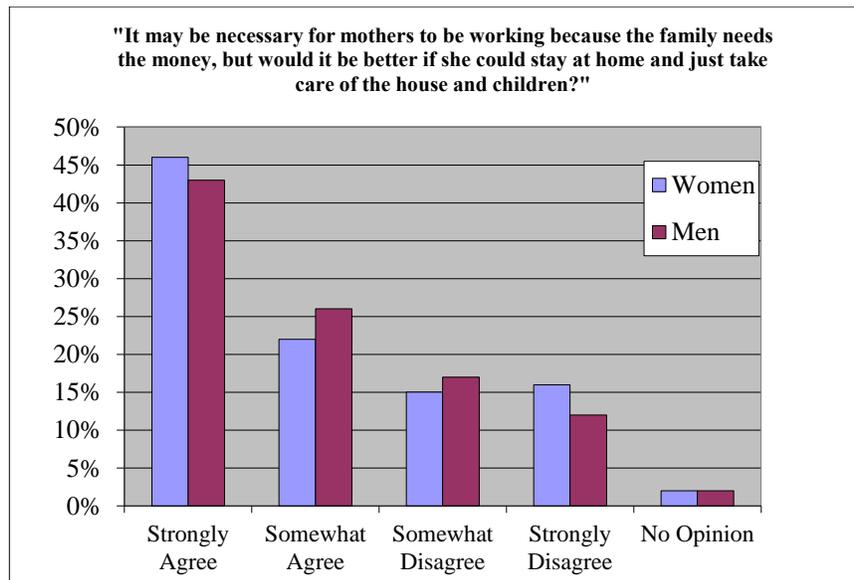
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 2000.[21]

In her comprehensive review of over a decade's worth of research on motherhood, Terry Arendell confirms that the dominant myth of the ideal mother at the dawn of the twenty-first century was still a full-time mother

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19   *See* STEPHANIE COONTZ, THE WAY WE NEVER WERE: AMERICAN FAMILIES AND THE NOSTALGIA TRAP (1992); HAYS, *supra* note 6.

20   JAMES T. BOND ET AL., NEW YORK: FAMILIES AND WORK INSTITUTE, THE 1997 NATIONAL STUDY OF THE CHANGING WORKFORCE 54 (1998).

21   KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION, ISSUES IN THE 2000 ELECTION: VALUES (2000), https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2000/09/3061-t.pdf; *See also* Kathleen Sylvester, *Caring for Our Youngest: Public Attitudes in the United States*, FUTURE OF CHILD. J., Spring/Summer 2001, at 55-56.

engaged in "intensive mothering."[22] Other scholars similarly place the full-time mother at the top of socially-constructed motherhood hierarchies by defining the heterosexual, stay-at-home mom as the "appropriate mother stereotype"[23] or in the "conformist" category[24] when discussing contemporary motherhood.[25] Arendell argues, however, that this enduring construction of the ideal mother as one who functions exclusively in the home has evolved into a state of "hegemonic motherhood."[26] When one ideology or construction dominates, alternative ideologies of motherhood are typically discussed using "deviancy discourses."[27] Race, class, and employment status have been the central characteristics used to differentiate various types of "deviant" mothers.[28]

This state of "hegemonic motherhood" is particularly insidious given the apparent mismatch between the idealized myth and the realities that most mothers now face. Incredibly, at the start of the twenty-first century, the majority of American mothers worked outside the home, yet the majority of American mothers also believed that a full-time at-home mother equated to the best mother (See Figure 3).[29] This still rings true despite the fact that mothers' workforce participation generally continues to grow.[30] This contradiction between idealized motherhood mythologies and the actual experiences of many mothers reaffirms the conflicting values and messages that contemporary American mothers must confront.[31] Pope, Quinn, & Wyer acknowledge this contradiction and note that "in the collision of reality with mythology, it is the mythology that tends to prevail" and moreover, that the "ideology of mothering can be so powerful that the failure of lived experience to validate often produces either intensified efforts to achieve it or a destructive cycle of self- and/or mother-

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22   Teresa Arendell, *Mothering and Motherhood: A Decade Review* 5-6 (Berkeley Ctr. for Working Families, Working Paper No. 3, 1999), http://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:100461/datastream/PDF/view.

23   Elena Marie DiLapi, *Lesbian Mothers and the Motherhood Hierarchy*, 18 J. OF HOMOSEXUALITY 101, 110 (1989).

24   ANGELA HATTERY, WOMEN, WORK, AND FAMILY: BALANCING AND WEAVING 99-103 (2001).

25   *See also* MARY TUOMINEN, SOC'Y FOR THE STUDY OF SOC. PROBLEMS, THE POLITICS OF MOTHERHOOD AND CHILD CARE: FEDERAL CHILD CARE POLICY AND THE HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF MOTHERHOOD 8-25 (1991); Mary Tuominen, *Gender, Class, and Motherhood: The Legacy of Federal Child Care Policy*, 7 J. WOMEN & SOC. WORK 8, 8 (1992).

26   Teresa Arendell, *Hegemonic Motherhood: Deviancy Discourses and Employed Mothers' Accounts of Out-of-School Time Issues* 4 (Berkeley Ctr. for Working Families, Working Paper No. 9, 1999), https://workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/sites/workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/files/imported/new/berkeley/papers/9.pdf.

27   *Id.* at 4-8.

28   *Id.* at 4.

29   *See* Figure 3, page 8.

30   UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, MOTHERS AND FAMILIES: SELECTED LABOR FORCE STATISTICS (2013), http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/mother_families.htm (last visited Nov. 9, 2015).

31   Donna Bassin et al., *Introduction, in* REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD 2-3 (Donna Bassin et al. eds., 1994).

blame."[32] To better understand how we have reached this rather unsatisfying, and ultimately damaging, impasse regarding American motherhood, a brief historical review of how motherhood mythologies and stereotypes have changed over time provides some important insights.

II. THE EVOLUTION OF MATERNAL MYTHS & STEREOTYPES

As socially-constructed ideologies, myths of motherhood have proven highly volatile and subject to cultural, political, and economic influences.[33] Historically, the locus of the motherhood debate has centered on the ideal "Good Mother."[34] Shari Thurer offers a particularly far-reaching exploration of how "culture reinvents the good mother" by examining the construction of this maternal ideal throughout the Stone Age, Ancient Egypt, Medieval Times, and the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.[35] Diane Eyer conducts a similar historical analysis that focuses on how Americans have conceptualized the "Good Mother" throughout the nation's history.[36] With Colonial *fathers* as the first "Good Mothers" in American history, Eyer argues that the idealized American mother gradually morphed into a "hearth angel" after the Industrial Revolution,[37] then into a professionalized "housewife" in the 1950s,[38] and ultimately became "Super Mom" in the 1980s.[39]

A.   "SUPER MOM"

As mothers entered the workforce in record numbers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, June Cleaver no longer held the same cultural resonance, and the mythological Super Mom gradually surpassed Mrs. Cleaver in popularity.[40] This new, maternal ideal embraced the dual roles of worker and mother, while also implying that it would take superhuman powers to do so[41]: "The definition of Supermom implies that to have it all, a woman must do it all—work for pay, keep the house, raise the kids, nurture the marriage."[42] Even from its inception, this myth of motherhood set most mothers up to fall short of this newly constructed ideal of the "Good

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32   *Id.* at 3.
33   *See* MIMI ABRAMOVITZ, REGULATING THE LIVES OF WOMEN: SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY FROM COLONIAL TIMES TO THE PRESENT (1996); *see also* SUSAN CHIRA, A MOTHER'S PLACE: TAKING THE DEBATE ABOUT WORKING MOTHERS BEYOND GUILT AND BLAME (1998); Patricia Hill Collins, *Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood*, *in* REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD 56 (Donna Bassin et al. eds., 1994); Rachel T. Hare-Mustin & Patricia C. Broderick, *The Myth of Motherhood: A Study of Attitudes Toward Motherhood*, 4 PSYCHOL. OF WOMEN Q. 114, 114 (1979).
34   THURER, *supra* note 6, at 142.
35   *See id.*
36   EYER, *supra* note 6, at 35-40.
37   *Id.* at 39-40.
38   *Id.* at 43-45.
39   *Id.* at 65-66.
40   *Id.*
41   VILLANI, *supra* note 9, at 118-22.
42   *Id.* at 118.

Mother."[43] In 1978, just as the Super Mom stereotype was gaining momentum, newspaper columnist Ellen Goodman offered this caricature of her:

> Superwoman gets up in the morning and wakes her 2.6 children, feeds them a grade-A nutritional breakfast, and then goes upstairs and gets dressed in her Anne Klein suit, goes off to her $25,000-a-year job doing work which is creative and socially useful. Then she comes home after work and spends a real meaningful hour with her children because after all, it's not the quantity of time, but the quality of time. Following that, she goes into the kitchen and creates a Julia Child 60-minute gourmet recipe, having a wonderful family dinner discussing the checks and balances of the United States government system. The children go upstairs to bed and she and her husband spend another hour in their own meaningful relationship.[44]

This new Super Mom was expected to do all of June Cleaver's chores while also fulfilling her new professional responsibilities.[45] Sociologist Arlie Hochschild exposed the inequity of this double-duty expectation and argued that employed moms were still expected to work a "second shift" in their households[46] and had to do so within the constraints of a "time bind."[47] In fact, an analysis of the Super Moms of the 1990s offers strong empirical support for Hochschild's "second shift" argument and finds that employed mothers performed nearly the same number of daily household and child care activities as full-time mothers.[48]

Given the near impossibility of actually attaining Super Mom status, it is not surprising that the discourse surrounding this maternal ideal gradually began to include concerns about a "Super Mom Syndrome" that was perceived to be harmful to mothers, children, and families.[49] The backlash to maternal employment was propelled by many different critics including child development "experts," the Religious Right, the media, and occasionally, social science research.[50] Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, child development research on attachment theory (and more recently, on infant brain development) was used as the primary ammunition against working mothers.[51] Dr. Terry Brazelton, a popular parenting expert, even

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43   *See* THURER, *supra* note 6, at 142.

44   VILLANI, *supra* note 9, at 30.

45   *Id.*

46   *See* ARLIE R. HOCHSCHILD, THE SECOND SHIFT: WORKING PARENTS AND THE REVOLUTION AT HOME (1989).

47   *See* ARLIE R. HOCHSCHILD, THE TIME BIND: WHEN WORK BECOMES HOME AND HOME BECOMES WORK (1997).

48   *See* Debra K. DeMeis & H. Wesley Perkins, *"Supermoms" of the Nineties: Homemaker and Employed Mothers' Performance and Perceptions of the Motherhood Role*, 17 J. FAM. ISSUES 777, 787 (1996).

49   *E.g.*, Nicole L. Oliver, The Supermom Syndrome: an Intervention against the Need to be King of the Mothering Mountain (2011) (unpublished M.A. thesis, Royal Roads University), http://dspace.royalroads.ca/docs/bitstream/handle/10170/460/oliver_nicole.pdf?sequence=1.

50   DeMeis, *supra* note 48; CHIRA, *supra* note 33, at 194–98.

51   EYER, *supra* note 6, at 70–71; BETTY HOLCOMB, NOT GUILTY! THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT WORKING MOTHERS 174–75, 177–82 (1998).

went so far as to argue that if women did not stay home with their infants for at least the first year, they were at risk of raising future "terrorists."[52] Such proponents of attachment theory argue that children with working mothers will not bond appropriately with their mothers, resulting in a lifetime of social disabilities as adults.[53] Psychologists promoting this interpretation of attachment theory thereby imply, in essence, that mothers who work full-time impede their child's development.[54]

Conservative members of the increasingly influential Religious Right also attacked working mothers for defying their biologically predetermined roles as full-time mothers.[55] This call for a return to "natural motherhood" is often couched in the language of family values[56] and is reminiscent of the rhetoric Nixon used when vetoing the 1971 federal child care legislation.[57] To explain his surprise veto, Nixon argued that federal involvement in child care policy would "commit the vast moral authority of the national government to the side of communal approaches to child-rearing over and against the family-centered approach."[58] The "natural motherhood" camp attributes the influx of mothers into the workforce to the devaluation of full-time motherhood in the wake of the feminist movement.[59] Conservative psychologist Dr. James C. Dobson has been a strong proponent of this view and argues that:

> Motherhood is an honorable profession that didn't have to be defended for thousands of years. But in the last few decades, young women have been made to feel foolish if they even dared mentioning homemaking as a goal . . . . There is no more important job in the universe than to raise a child to love God, live productively and serve humanity. How ridiculous that a woman should have to apologize for wanting to fulfill that historical role![60]

This appeal to a mother's "natural" or "innate" sensibilities has proven appealing for some mothers, labeled "Modern Madonnas," who wanted to leave their careers to return to full-time motherhood as an expression of their religious values.[61] The natural motherhood argument, while empowering to some mothers, simultaneously implies that mothers who continued to work, whether by choice or economic necessity, are somehow unnatural.[62]

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52   EYER, *supra* note 6, at 6.
53   HOLCOMB, *supra* note 51 at 185–86, 189–91.
54   *Id*. This is not to argue, however, that infants and young children do not benefit from early brain stimulation or bonding experiences with caring adults. What is disputed here is the interpretation that only a full-time mother can provide these important developmental opportunities for their children.
55   CHIRA, *supra* note 33, at 194-98.
56   *Id.* at 198.
57   MARY FRANCES BERRY, THE POLITICS OF PARENTHOOD: CHILD CARE, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, AND THE MYTH OF THE GOOD MOTHER 137 (1993).
58   *Id.*
59   VILLANI, *supra* note 9, at 137-38.
60   *Id.* at 112.
61   KATHRYN KELLER, MOTHERS AND WORK IN POPULAR AMERICAN MAGAZINES 97-99 (1994).
62   *See id.*

The popular media has also helped to diminish the luster of the Super Mom ideal by labeling career-oriented mothers as selfish or uncaring: "In congressional testimony, glossy magazines, news stories, and Op-Ed pieces, moms with successful careers were reviled as selfish and materialistic, putting their own ambitions ahead of their children's needs."[63] The news coverage surrounding Marcia Clark, a prosecutor in the O.J. Simpson trial and a divorced mother of two, provides a particularly vivid example of how the media began to promote increasingly negative constructions of working mothers.[64] When Marcia Clark's ex-husband filed for custody of her children during this pinnacle of her prosecutorial career, on the grounds that she was putting her work before her children, New York's *Newsday* published a headline that exclaimed, "Bad Mom, Good Prosecutor."[65] Not surprisingly, the media and the public were not especially concerned with offering similar pronouncements about the working fathers who participated in this trial.[66] The debate surrounding Marcia Clark's work and family choices warned career-oriented mothers that combining professional ambition and achievement with effective mothering was difficult, and even risky, in some cases.[67]

The high profile trial of young British au pair Louise Woodward, accused of murdering the child of a wealthy Massachusetts couple, sparked additional attacks on professional mothers.[68] Instead of focusing exclusively on the actions of the au pair, the media and public debated the actions of the toddler's mother, Deborah Eappen, who worked full time as a physician: "The verdict: Guilty—of careerism, of callousness, of hiring someone to do a job only a mother should do."[69] In fact, some pundits even went so far as to accuse Dr. Eappen of contributing to the death of her child simply by choosing a career over full-time motherhood.[70]

This is not the first time in recent history that working mothers have been blamed for child abuse or neglect that was committed by child care providers in their absence.[71] Feminist authors like Susan Faludi, as well as many social scientists, have argued that the "day care hysteria," fomented by a few highly salient child abuse cases, was primarily a means for scaring and criticizing already conflicted working mothers.[72] Empirical evidence challenging this perceived epidemic of child abuse was typically ignored by the popular media, including a major university study that found abuse to be much more likely in a child's home rather than in day care centers.[73]

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63   HOLCOMB, *supra* note 51 at 20.
64   CHIRA, *supra* note 33, at 167.
65   *Id.*
66   *Id.*
67   *Id.*
68   *Id.* at 3.
69   *Id.*
70   *Id.*
71   *See* EYER, *supra* note 6, at 9-10; SUSAN FALUDI, BACKLASH: THE UNDECLARED WAR AGAINST AMERICAN WOMEN 41-45 (1991); KELLER, *supra* note 61, at 130-31.
72   FALUDI, *supra* note 71, at 41-45.
73   FALUDI, *supra* note 71; KELLER, *supra* note 61, at 130-31; THURER, *supra* note 6 at 291-92.

Unfortunately, the public, the media, and many working mothers themselves have, quite unfairly, begun to hold working mothers at least partially responsible for the crimes committed by abusive child care providers.[74]

As the attacks on working mothers proliferated, feminist scholars mounted a spirited defense.[75] Such scholars often presented evidence showing that maternal employment did not harm children and moreover, that children can actually benefit from observing their mother engaged in fulfilling work.[76] Some defenders of working mothers, however, ended up resuscitating the fading Super Mom ideal.[77] To more effectively deal with the stresses of their dual worker-mother role, working women were urged to try a variety of different strategies including "juggling,"[78] "balancing and weaving,"[79] choosing the "mommy track" at work,[80] and "quality time."[81] However, such coping mechanisms did not challenge the core assumption of the Super Mom myth: that working women must do it all to have it all.[82] Moreover, social scientists and the media have dismissed many of these strategies as ineffective or unfair.[83]

Most recent scholarship has acknowledged the need to develop alternative strategies for supporting working mothers, their children, and their families.[84] Not surprisingly, the most popular approach suggested is for the U.S. government to acknowledge the need to create a more effective child care system.[85] Many advocates are also urging employers to develop more family-friendly work environments and to address persistent gender inequalities both in the workplace and in the home.[86] Despite these pleas for greater support of working mothers, the Mommy Wars continue to rage with the idealized full-time mother dominating this ideological battle.

B. "SOCCER MOM"

The leader in this conflict over the ideal "Good Mother" during the years leading up to the creation of the CCDF was the "Soccer Mom" stereotype that first emerged during the 1996 Presidential Election.[87] While

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74   FALUDI, *supra* note 71; KELLER, *supra* note 61, at 130-31, 159.
75   *E.g.,* ANITA SHREVE, REMAKING MOTHERHOOD: HOW WORKING MOTHERS ARE SHAPING OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE (1987).
76   *Id.*
77   *E.g.,* FAYE J. CROSBY, JUGGLING: THE UNEXPECTED ADVANTAGES OF BALANCING CAREER AND HOME FOR WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES (1991).
78   *Id.* at 59-82.
79   HATTERY, *supra* note 24, at 3-5, 41-67.
80   Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Social Constructions of Mothering: A Thematic Overview*, *in* MOTHERING: IDEOLOGY, EXPERIENCE, AND AGENCY 1, 2 (Evelyn Nakano Glenn et al. eds., 1994).
81   *See* HOLCOMB, *supra* note 51, at 20-21.
82   CROSBY, *supra* note 77.
83   HOCHSCHILD, THE TIME BIND, *supra* note 47, at 50-51, 211-12 (subjecting the "quality time" approach to especially harsh critique); *see also* HOLCOMB, *supra* note 51, at 21.
84   *See* EYER, *supra* note 6.
85   *Id.* at 175-80.
86   *See* BERRY, *supra* note 57; *see also* HOLCOMB, *supra* note 51; SHREVE, *supra* note 75.
87   CHIRA *supra* note 33, at 192-93.

the 1994 mid-term elections were coined the year of the "Angry White Men,"[88] the 1996 campaign between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole appeared to hinge on the votes of America's Soccer Moms.[89] While pollsters and the media debated the precise definition (especially in terms of employment status) of this new and influential voting bloc during the campaign, the Soccer Mom stereotype continues to be shorthand for a white, married, politically moderate to conservative, suburban, stay-at-home mother— "She's June Cleaver in a minivan."[90] She was even immortalized in a 1996 poem (loosely defined) by J. Warner Ralls entitled "Soccer Moms"[91]:

> Recent years in the USA have provided a new way to designate certain active mothers.
> These soccer moms are little youngish women who daily wear athletic shoes and dress.
> They tool around in station wagons, pickup trucks and vans to provide rides to others.
> Getting heirs and heiresses to practice and performance is a labor of love they confess.

Though clearly lacking in grace (and poetic meter for that matter), this poem vividly demonstrates one of the primary ways the Soccer Mom differentiated herself from June Cleaver—the Soccer Mom always puts her "heirs and heiresses" first. This newer myth of motherhood is "not about staying home to be a helpmeet for your husband or devoting yourself to making your floors spick and span; it is about making sure your babies are the best they can be."[92] While June Cleaver was a "housewife" or "homemaker," the Soccer Mom is a "full-time mother" with her housekeeping responsibilities noticeably absent from her new title.[93]

The Soccer Mom also clearly distinguished herself from working mothers plagued with the Super Mom Syndrome by making her priorities quite clear: while the Super Mom struggles to be a successful worker, mother, wife, and homemaker simultaneously, the Soccer Mom is unquestionably a mother first, with all other roles as secondary. In this way, the Soccer Mom myth has provided a somewhat clearer ideal for mothers who have tried unsuccessfully to meet the Super Mom ideal. In fact, most

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88   George Packer, *Poor, White, and Republican*, THE NEW YORKER (Feb. 13, 2012), http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/poor-white-and-republican.

89   CHIRA *supra* note 33, at 192-93.

90   ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS, Nov. 3, 1996. Because the "Soccer Mom" was still relatively new to the American cultural and political scene, this stereotype continued to evolve in the eyes of the public. Many women who refer to themselves as Soccer Moms, for instance, often work full-time or part-time, although their mothering responsibilities are typically described as their primary focus. For the purposes of this project, however, the earlier stereotype of the Soccer Mom as a full-time mother was used to more effectively differentiate the four types of mothers who comprise the most likely group of child care policy target populations.

91   J. Warner Ralls, Soccer Moms (unpublished poem), http://www.zonalatina.com/Zldata307.htm.

92   CHIRA, *supra* note 33, at 18.

93   *Id.*

women who have chosen to leave their careers to raise their children full-time very consciously view the Soccer Mom lifestyle as an alternative to the more stressful life of the Super Mom: "Soccer moms of the 1990s were the 'supermoms' of the 1980s. Many of them have kicked off their high heels and replaced them with Keds to watch their kids."[94] These stay-at-home moms then, were no longer primarily conservative Christian proponents of the "natural motherhood" ideology—the Soccer Mom is decidedly more mainstream.

While more politically moderate and popular than the full-time mothers of the 1980s, stay-at-home Soccer Moms are not nearly as common as reported. Despite media reports that this "new cult of domesticity" or "new feminine mystique" is a significant demographic trend, staying home full-time is not possible or even desirable for many contemporary mothers.[95] In fact, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times Magazine* both ran articles labeling the stay-home mother as the new "status symbol" of the 1990s.[96] In this sense, the Soccer Mom is typically perceived as "lucky" to get to stay home with her children.[97] Despite this clear endorsement of the stay-at-home Soccer Mom as the maternal ideal of the 1990s and beyond, many full-time mothers struggle with many of the same conflicting pressures as working mothers.

In their longitudinal study of stay-at-home mothers in 1978 and 1995, Villani and Ryan found that many full-time mothers still feel the pressures of Super Motherhood despite their choice to "simplify" their lives by leaving their careers.[98] They also found that some full-time mothers can experience a "mother crisis" when their perceived failure to meet the "Good Mother" ideal reaches a distressing level.[99] There is also evidence that full-time mothers are more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety than employed mothers.[100] While there was no real discussion of "Soccer Mom Syndrome," it is important to note that stay-at-home mothers have not been entirely immune from public critique.

With the majority of mothers now working, full-time mothers are still in the elite minority[101] and consequently, are often compelled to justify their choices. Indeed, many stay-at-home mothers are still asked the

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94   *Id.* at 207.
95   *See id.* at 18.
96   Alecia Swasy, *Stay-at-Home Moms Are Fashionable Again in Many Communities*, WALL STREET. J., July 23, 1993, at A1; Sara Mosle, *Lives; The Importance of Being Busy*, N.Y. TIMES MAG. (Nov. 15, 1998), http://www.nytimes.com/1998/11/15/magazine/lives-the-importance-of-being-busy.html.
97   HOLCOMB, *supra* note 51, at 43.
98   *See* VILLANI, *supra* note 9.
99   *Id.* at 3-11.
100   *See* ARENDELL, *supra* note 22, at 15, 24. (discussing the psychological literature).
101   D'Vera Cohn, et. al., *After Decades of Decline, a Rise in Stay-at-Home Mothers*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Apr. 8, 2014) http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/04/08/after-decades-of-decline-a-rise-in-stay-at-home-mothers/ (providing that in 2012, 29% of mothers did not work outside the home).

ubiquitous and rather insensitive question, "So, what do you *do* all day?"[102] To counteract such criticisms, particularly from working mothers, full-time mothers have developed a variety of responses and supports in the context of the Mommy Wars. Many stay-at-home mothers, for instance, have organized local support groups and two national support groups; Mothers-at-Home and FEMALE, have been gaining in popularity and membership. It is interesting to note that when FEMALE was founded in 1987, the acronym stood for "Formerly Employed Mothers at Loose Ends"; in 1991, the acronym was changed to "Formerly Employed Mothers at the Leading Edge."[103] This seemingly minor linguistic shift vividly shows how full-time mothers have become more confident in promoting their vision of motherhood.

The use of the phrase "I am my kid's mom" by conservative radio host Dr. Laura Schlessinger, and many of her callers, is another way language has been used effectively in the Mommy Wars.[104] This statement reinforces the central characteristic of the "Soccer Mom" ideal—that she always puts children first. This phrase, as well as the bulk of "Dr. Laura's" commentary during her very popular 1990s radio broadcasts, simultaneously praised full-time mothers while chastising employed mothers for choosing careers over the well-being of their children.[105] Many full-time mothers, however, are still made to feel defensive about their choice to not pursue professional fulfillment through employment. Some full-time mothers respond to this critique by reminding the public that they are engaged in the important work of child development and rearing, referring to their work as a "P.H.D.," an acronym meant to stand for "parent home daily."[106] While seemingly rather light and witty in tone, such sound bites have been effective weapons in the ideological battles between employed and full-time mothers.

This repartee between proponents of full-time motherhood and supporters of working motherhood fuels the media-driven Mommy Wars. These battles persist into current times on social media outlets and have progressed very little since the turn of the twenty-first century. For an example of what little progress has been made on this front, just log on to the upper-class-leaning and rather New York-centric Urban Baby webpage on any given day to see the barbs traded between Stay-At-Home-Moms ("SAHM's") and Work Outside the Home Moms ("WOHM's").[107]

What is glaringly absent from this struggle over the construction of motherhood is any real discussion of mothers who are not middle class or white. The battle between the Super Mom and the Soccer Mom is

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102   *E.g.*, Raquel D'Apice, *What I Do All Day When I Am Home With the Baby,* HUFFINGTON POST (Feb. 26, 2014, 8:54 AM) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/raquel-dapice/what-i-do-all-day-when-i-am-home-with-the-baby_b_4741568.html.

103   HOLCOMB, *supra* note 51, at 82-83; VILLANI, *supra* note 9, at 113.

104   CHIRA, *supra* note 33, at 3-5.

105   *Id.*

106   KELLER, *supra* note 61, at 108.

107   URBAN BABY, http://www.urbanbaby.com (last visited Nov. 9, 2015).

ultimately, an elite battle between white, upper middle class mothers for whom working or not working is a "choice." Low-income mothers, single mothers, teen mothers, minority mothers, and welfare mothers are rarely, if ever, included in the Mommy Wars, as they typically "have to work." Their "deviant" status[108] makes such mothers invisible in this gender role debate. Indeed, as Chira notes, "all the crocodile tears shed over the rights of children to a mother at home are largely tears saved for the middle class."[109] The "need to work" argument has proven to be a particularly resonant rationalization for explaining why many lower income and minority mothers do not meet the "hegemonic" maternal ideal of a full-time mother.[110] Such lower income working mothers, however, are still typically discussed under a deviancy rubric, as are the other groups of mothers listed above who are excluded from the Mommy Wars debate.

C. "WAITRESS MOM"

While career-oriented Super Moms are criticized for selfishly choosing their own professional development over their children, low-income, working Waitress Moms are pitied for needing to financially support their families. The Waitress Mom stereotype emerged in the 1998 mid-term election as a low-income, hard-working, occasionally single, but usually married, mother with little formal education and a low-paying job or jobs.[111] The character Alice from the television sitcom *Mel's Diner* is a fictional representation of this stereotype (See Figure 4 for a media caricature of the Waitress Mom). Democratic pollster Celinda Lake officially coined this phrase and characterized Waitress Moms as a potentially important voting bloc concerned about "bread-and-butter family issues and possibly too exhausted to vote."[112] The Waitress Mom also played a prominent role in the 2000 presidential election with Al Gore profiling his own mother as a Waitress Mom working two jobs to support her family in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention.[113]

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108 PATRICIA COLLINS, BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT: KNOWLEDGE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT 81-84 (1990); MICHELE WALLACE, BLACK MACHO AND THE MYTH OF THE SUPERWOMAN 106 (1990).

109 CHIRA, *supra* note 33, at 210.

110 ARENDELL, HEGEMONIC MOTHERHOOD, *supra* note 26.

111 James Poniewozik, *Freshen Up Your Election, Hon?*, SALON MAG. (Nov. 3, 1998, 12:00 PM), http://www.salon.com/1998/11/03/poni_20/.

112 *Id.*

113 Albert Gore, Jr., Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles (Aug.17, 2000), *in* THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY PROJECT, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25963.

Figure 4. "The Attack of the 60 Foot Waitress Mom"

Source: Salon Online Magazine, November 3, 1998

Despite her arrival on the popular media scene, the Waitress Mom has not really received commensurate scholarly attention. With the majority of feminist scholarship on the experiences of white middle-class women, many scholars are now beginning to study the long overlooked experiences of minority and lower-income mothers. The work of sociologist Patricia Hill Collins on the intersections between race, class, and motherhood is representative of this turn to a more inclusive study of motherhood and work.[114] There is also a growing body of ethnographic research on various groups of low-income mothers that examines the work and family lives of Chicana factory workers, African American hospital personnel, and Japanese domestic workers.[115] Irene Browne's impressive volume *Latinas and African American Women at Work* also explores the working lives of minority mothers in four major American cities.[116] By documenting the challenging experiences of these Waitress-type Moms, this research shows that while middle and upper middle class mothers debate the efficacy of combining full-time work with motherhood, these lower income mothers have quietly become the new Super Moms, attempting to "juggle," "weave," and "balance" their multiple roles.

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114   *See* PATRICIA HILL COLLINS, BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT: KNOWLEDGE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT (1990); Patricia Hill Collins, *The Social Construction of Invisibility: Black Women's Poverty in Social Problems Discourse*, 1 PERSP. ON SOC. PROBS. 77 (1989).

115   *See, e.g.*, LOUISE LAMPHERE ET. AL., SUNBELT WORKING MOTHERS: RECONCILING FAMILY AND FACTORY (Louise Lamphere et al. eds., 1993).

116   *See* RUSSELL SAGE FOUNDATION, LATINAS AND AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AT WORK: RACE, GENDER, AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY (Irene Browne ed., 1999).

The Super Mom label, however, is rarely used to describe minority or working class women, even when they take on the same work and family responsibilities as this mythic mother.[117] The Waitress Mom label does allow low-income and minority mothers to avoid some of the cries of selfishness and greed that are leveled at wealthier, career-oriented Super Moms.[118] The public tends to view Waitress Moms as simply too busy or too financially insecure to suffer from the Super Mom Syndrome.

Another reason that Waitress Moms are not attacked on the basis of their labor force participation is that the American public has historically viewed low-income and minority mothers as workers first and mothers second—a decidedly different standard than the "children first" mandate for more financially stable Super Moms and Soccer Moms.[119] While Super Moms have struggled to combine their mother and worker roles, minority and working class mothers throughout American history have had to blur the line between these two roles. The separate-spheres concept used by many feminist scholars to explain historical changes in status of American mothers then, does not readily transfer to minority mothers as "work and family have rarely functioned as dichotomous spheres for women of color."[120]

Because the Waitress Mom has no choice but to combine her mother and worker roles, she confronts the same work-family balance challenges as Super Mom, but with significantly less power and support. Taking the superhero metaphor a step further, she is expected to do the work of Super Man, even though she only has the power of his mere human alter-ego, Clark Kent. However, as Collins notes, "more than do supermom doctors, lawyers, and corporation executives, working-class working mothers and their households represent the kinds of diversity, flexibility, and change that are becoming characteristic of American working families."[121] While the Super Mom and Soccer Mom fight to become the reigning maternal ideal, the Waitress Mom has become reality for many of America's mothers.

Although the Waitress Mom stereotype is more representative of the real-world experience of a growing population of working mothers, low-income working mothers have been noticeably absent from most political and cultural debates. Indeed, they appear to represent what Theda Skocpol calls the "missing middle" in American social policy.[122] A likely explanation for the apparent invisibility of the Waitress Mom in modern social policy debates can be found in my earlier model of child care policy

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117 *But cf.* MICHELE WALLACE, BLACK MACHO AND THE MYTH OF THE SUPERWOMAN 107 (1990) (arguing that the "Superwoman" stereotype has been applied to black women, but primarily as a means for rationalizing the persistent societal and governmental neglect of struggling black mothers throughout American history).

118 CHIRA, *supra* 33, at 210.

119 *See* ABRAMOVITZ, *supra* note 33; *see also* SONYA MICHEL, CHILDREN'S INTEREST/MOTHERS' RIGHTS: THE SHAPING OF AMERICA'S CHILD CARE POLICY (1999).

120 COLLINS, BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT *supra* note 108.

121 *Id.*

122 *See* THEDA SKOCPOL, THE MISSING MIDDLE: WORKING FAMILIES AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN SOCIAL POLICY (2000).

target populations, where low-income working mothers fit in the "dependents" category (See Figure 2).

According to Schneider and Ingram, "dependent" populations are positively constructed, but lack political power and consequently are rarely targeted for policy benefits or burdens.[123] Alternatively, "contender" and "advantaged" populations vary in how they are constructed, but ultimately have the political power to successfully secure policy benefits while minimizing policy burdens.[124] Interestingly, "deviant" populations are also more likely than "dependents" to elicit a policy response, but such responses are typically punitive in nature.[125] According to this model then, Soccer Moms and Super Moms receive positive policy responses, Welfare Queens receive punitive policy responses, and the Waitress Mom is simply ignored. However, as more and more low-income mothers enter the workforce with rapidly increasing child care needs, it is unlikely that the Waitress Mom will remain invisible for long.

D.   "WELFARE QUEEN"

In contrast to the rather minimal political and scholarly attention given to the Waitress Mom, the Welfare Queen stereotype has been analyzed extensively by the public, the media, scholars, and political actors. The Welfare Queen myth encapsulates a range of characteristics that crown her the ultimate deviant mother in American culture: she is African American, she is "unwed" or single, she started child-bearing as a teen, and she does not put her children first though she stays home full time and does not work.[126]

The Welfare Queen myth has proven to be an extremely potent rhetorical tool in a wide range of political settings. She has most famously been used as a justification for cutting government spending on a range of social policies. When Ronald Reagan first introduced America to this image of a scheming welfare recipient who illegally claimed benefits under a number of aliases while driving a "Welfare Cadillac," he sparked a popular backlash against the Welfare Queen that enabled him to significantly cut Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits and introduce punitive work requirements.[127] Though Reagan's portrait of the Chicago-based Welfare Queen was found to be greatly exaggerated, the outrage over this perpetrator of welfare fraud was enormous and long-

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123   ANNE SCHNEIDER & HELEN INGRAM, POLICY DESIGN FOR DEMOCRACY 109 (1997).

124   *Id.* at 108.

125   *Id.* at 120-22.

126   The only maternal construction that might possibly be classified as more deviant than the Welfare Queen is the "Crack Mother" stereotype, which often adds severe drug addiction to the Welfare Queen stereotype. *See* DREW HUMPHRIES, CRACK MOTHERS: PREGNANCY, DRUGS, AND THE MEDIA (1999).

127   PREMILLA NADASEN, JENNIFER MITTELSTADT & MARISA CHAPPEL, WELFARE IN THE UNITED STATES: A HISTORY WITH DOCUMENTS 189-92 (2009).

lasting.[128] This demonstrates the rhetorical power of the Welfare Queen myth—the *idea* of this conniving and evil "welfare cheat" was enough to affect public policy regardless of actual fact.

Despite the cultural resonance of Reagan's Welfare Queen, there is little evidence that most women receiving welfare deserved this derogatory label. In fact, when Reagan drew public attention to the "problem" of Welfare Queens, the majority of welfare recipients were white and not black.[129] Moreover, most Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients are on assistance for six years on average and have fewer children than the average for the general population.[130] Social science research has also refuted the Welfare Queen stereotype by profiling welfare recipients who work hard to find ways to support themselves and their families in the face of substantial economic and personal obstacles.[131] As Ange-Marie Hancock argues then, Welfare Queen is the "ultimate oxymoron."[132] This evidence disproving the purported Welfare Queen epidemic, however, has been overlooked by the media, politicians, and the public, as the story of the Welfare Queen fits much more readily with cultural expectations and beliefs about low-income minority mothers.[133]

The potency of this myth of motherhood lies in its explicit and implicit racial content. Unlike the other maternal stereotypes explored in this paper, the race of the Welfare Queen is always clear, even when it is not directly stated. In fact, Reagan never described the Welfare Queen in his speech as black,[134] although as Eyer notes, "Those promiscuous, lazy, TV-watching, imagine-them-to-be-black-and-overweight from eating so many tax dollars (nonvoting) ghetto females provided the perfect scapegoat."[135] In this way, the Welfare Queen imagery allows political actors to use racially-loaded rhetoric in a less explicit, more politically palatable manner. While conservative politicians including Reagan argued that they did not use the Welfare Queen label to single out black women, but rather to expose

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128   *Id.*; *See also* John Blake, *The Return of the Welfare Queen*, CNN, http://www.cnn.com/2012/01/23/politics/weflare-queen (last updated Jan. 23, 2012).

129   Sanford F. Schram, *Putting a Black Face on Welfare*, *in* DESERVING AND ENTITLED: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN SOCIAL POLICY 261, 266-67 (Anne Schneider & Helen Ingram eds., 2005).

130   *Id.*

131   *See* KATHERINE EDIN & LAURA LEIN, MAKING ENDS MEET: HOW SINGLE MOTHERS SURVIVE WELFARE AND LOW-WAGE WORK (1997); *see also* DAVID ZUCCHINO, MYTH OF THE WELFARE QUEEN (1997); Vicki Lens, *Welfare Mothers and Work: Myths Versus Reality*, 33 JEWISH SOC. WORK F. 15, 15-16 (1997-1998).

132   Ange-Marie Hancock, *Contemporary Welfare Reform and the Public Identity of the "Welfare Queen,"* 10 RACE, GENDER & CLASS 31, 36 (2003).

133   The media have been especially remiss in presenting more accurate information about welfare mothers and have actually done much to contribute to the endurance of the mythical Welfare Queen. Martin Gilens reports in his *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, that the media dramatically over-represent African Americans in their stories and pictures on the topic of welfare leading the public to falsely believe that the majority of recipients are black. MARTIN GILENS, WHY AMERICANS HATE WELFARE: RACE, MEDIA, AND THE POLITICS OF ANTIPOVERTY POLICY 113 (1999).

134   Gene Demby, *The Truth Behind the Lies of the Original 'Welfare Queen*,*'* NPR (Dec. 20, 2013, 5:03 PM), http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/12/20/255819681/the-truth-behind-the-lies-of-the-original-welfare-queen.

135   EYER, *supra* note 6, at 20.

welfare fraud, the racial implications of this stereotype simply cannot be avoided.

The Welfare Queen is merely one of many racial stereotypes that have been applied to black mothers throughout American history. Stereotypes such as the nurturing "Mammy" image have been used to rationalize the exploitation of black women during slavery and eventually, to justify the employment status of black mothers as meagerly paid child care or domestic workers.[136] The headstrong and promiscuous "Sapphire" or "Jezebel" stereotype alternatively, has been used to justify treatment of black mothers as "deviants" in the context of social welfare policies.[137] This Sapphire imagery has proven especially enduring and reappeared in a slightly more flattering form as the "black matriarch" in the now infamous Moynihan Report of 1965[138] that began the "culture of poverty" debates.[139] In the wake of the perceived failures of the War on Poverty, a more sinister descendent of the black matriarch emerged to fuel the conservative backlash to government poverty programs: the Welfare Queen. Indeed, "Moynihan's matriarch is the precursor to Ronald Reagan's welfare queen."[140] The Welfare Queen's notorious family tree, which includes both Moynihan's headstrong black matriarch and the promiscuous Sapphire stereotype, at least partially explains her near "demonic" status in contemporary American society.[141]

In addition to her prominent minority status, the Welfare Queen has also been criticized for her status as a single or "unwed" mother. Here the Welfare Queen is not alone in her perceived deviancy, as single mothers across the globe have been almost universally scorned.[142] According to Ann Phoenix, single mothers are typically characterized as "'feckless,' willfully responsible for the poverty that has been well documented to be a feature of lone parenting . . . and undeserving of either public sympathy or economic support."[143] Because single mothers are much more likely than married

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136   K. SUE JEWELL, FROM MAMMY TO MISS AMERICA AND BEYOND 37-44 (1993); COLLINS, *supra* note 108, at 4, 80-82; *see also* WALLACE, *supra* note 108; Sau-ling C. Wong, *Diverted Mothering: Representations of Caregivers of Color in the Age of "Multiculturalism," in* MOTHERING: IDEOLOGY, EXPERIENCE, AND AGENCY 67-69 (Evelyn Nakano Glenn et al. eds., 1994).

137   COLLINS, *supra* note 108, at 81-84; WALLACE, *supra* note 108, at 106.

138   DANIEL P. MOYNIHAN, THE NEGRO FAMILY: THE CASE FOR NATIONAL ACTION (1965).

139   *See* Dionne Bensonsmith, Paper Presented at Western Political Science Association Conference, *From Windows to Welfare Queens: Race and Gender Construction in Welfare Reform* (Mar. 2000); *see also* Dionne Bensonsmith *Jezebels, Matriarchs, and Welfare Queens: The Moynihan Report of 1965 and the Social Construction of African American Women in Welfare Policy, in* DESERVING AND ENTITLED: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN SOCIAL POLICY 243 (2005).

140   Bensonsmith, *Jezebels, Matriarchs, and Welfare Queens, supra* note 140, at 243.

141   Wahneema Lubiano, *Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means, in* RACE-ING JUSTICE, EN-GENDERING POWER: ESSAYS ON ANITA HILL, CLARENCE THOMAS, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITY 323, 338 (Toni Morrison ed., 1992).

142   Rosemarie Nave-Herz, *Single Motherhood: An Alternative Form of Life?, in* UNRESOLVED DILEMMAS: WOMEN, WORK, AND THE FAMILY IN THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE AND THE FORMER SOVIET UNION 186 (Kaisa Kauppinen & Tuula Gordon eds., 1997).

143   Ann Phoenix, *Social Constructions of Lone Motherhood: A Case of Competing Discourses, in* GOOD ENOUGH MOTHERING? FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON LONE MOTHERING 175, 175 (Elizabeth Silva ed., 1996).

mothers to be poor, single mothers are much more likely to become welfare recipients as well.

Linda Gordon explores the connection between single motherhood and welfare receipt in her comprehensive historical work *Pitied, But Not Entitled*.[144] She argues that the evolution of the American welfare state is best understood as a series of government responses to the "single mother problem."[145] While at first the single mother was constructed positively as a white widow deserving federal assistance,[146] the single mother has gradually become associated with less deserving black mothers who are teenagers or who have never been married.[147] Thus, the "single mother," even when differentiated from the Welfare Queen, is still assumed to be black, economically-disadvantaged, and occasionally a "teen mom."

In the 1990s, teenage pregnancy emerged as a significant public problem that was closely linked to the problem of welfare dependence in popular discourse.[148] Although teen pregnancies were increasing for all sectors of the population, the birth rates among low-income, black, teenage girls were rising at a particularly fast pace, thereby reinforcing the Welfare Queen stereotype.[149] Teen pregnancy, like welfare dependence and single motherhood more generally, is constructed as a black problem.

The racialization of the single mother as a broader category of mother was made dramatically clear during the Dan Quayle vs. Murphy Brown scandal. Dhyana Ziegler describes this media event at length and notes that:

> It is ironic that Quayle chose to pick on TV character Murphy Brown, who is portrayed as a single woman with an annual income of more than $50,000 who made the choice to be a single parent, because Murphy does not fit the typical stereotype usually associated with single parenting, primarily and often profiled as an African American female who is on welfare. As a matter of fact, on the evening of the sitcom's 1992 fall premiere where Murphy struck back at the vice-president, Quayle selected a group of African American single parents in Washington, DC, to view the program with him to serve as a symbol of his support for single parenting.

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144   LINDA GORDON, PITIED BUT NOT ENTITLED: SINGLE MOTHERS AND THE HISTORY OF WELFARE 1890-1935 (1994).

145   *Id.* at 24-35.

146   *Id.* at 26-28.

147   Numerous scholars have documented the racially-motivated changes in American social policy as the population of welfare mothers gradually shifted from white to black. *See generally* ROBERT C. LIEBERMAN, SHIFTING THE COLOR LINE: RACE AND THE AMERICAN WELFARE STATE (1998); JILL QUADAGNO, THE COLOR OF WELFARE (1994); Gwendolyn Mink, *The Lady and the Tramp (II): Feminist Welfare Politics, Poor Single Mothers, and the Challenge of Welfare Justice*, 24 FEMINIST STUD. 55, 59 (1998).

148   *E.g.*, KATHLEEN MULLAN HARRIS, TEEN MOTHERS AND THE REVOLVING WELFARE DOOR 2 (1997).

149   ELAINE BELL KAPLAN, NOT OUR KIND OF GIRL: UNRAVELING THE MYTHS OF BLACK TEENAGE MOTHERHOOD 3 (1997).

> Unfortunately, Quayle's choice of this racial composition for the audience opened the door for more comments regarding his motives.[150]

This political "blunder," was "interpreted by many to give a coded racial message about who he considered as 'typical' lone parents."[151]

Since its inception in the 1980s, the racially-loaded Welfare Queen stereotype has been used by political elites, including Dan Quayle, to chip away at America's social safety net. While Reagan invoked her in the late 1970s to early 1980s to build support for the Family Support Act, which added work requirements to the AFDC program, her latest appearance was during the debates surrounding the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.[152] This time, however, both Democrats and Republicans were calling for the end of the Welfare Queen's reign. She was compared to both "alligators" and "wolves" by members of Congress,[153] and President Bill Clinton staunchly supported strict time limits and mandatory work requirements designed to punish the Welfare Queen for her years of dependency.[154] The cry to "end welfare as we know it" also implied that welfare reform should end the Welfare Queen as we know her. [155]

In addition to her duties as a pawn in American welfare policy games, the Welfare Queen has been used as an effective rhetorical device in other political arenas. Particularly disturbing was the labeling of President Clinton's nominee for Assistant Attorney General of Civil Rights, Lani Guinier, as a "quota queen."[156] This sound bite served as an effective euphemism for critics of Guinier who wouldn't dare accuse her outright of being too pro-black. Instead, the phrase "quota queen" was used to subtly associate her with both an extremely unpopular affirmative action approach (that she did not actually support) and the extremely unpopular Welfare Queen image.[157]

The Welfare Queen imagery was also present during the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Wahneema Lubiano argues that stereotypes of black women, in particular the impoverished Welfare Queen and the genteel, middle class "Black Lady," served to differentiate Justice Thomas from these negative images of African Americans and ultimately, to construct him as a black "hero":

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150   Dhyana Ziegler, *Single Parenting: A Visual Analysis*, *in* AFRICAN AMERICAN SINGLE MOTHERS: UNDERSTANDING THEIR LIVES AND FAMILIES 80, 81 (Bette J. Dickerson ed., 1995).

151   Phoenix, *supra* note 143, at 187.

152   CHIRA, *supra* note 33, at 211.

153   *Id.*

154   *Id.* at 216-17.

155   *Id.* at 217.

156   Laurel Leff, *The Making of a "Quota Queen": News Media and the Bias of Objectivity*, *in* FEMINISM, MEDIA AND THE LAW 27, 27-28 (Martha Fineman & Martha T. McClusky, eds., 1997). *See also* LANI GUINIER, THE TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY: FUNDAMENTAL FAIRNESS IN REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY (1994).

157   Leff, *supra* note 156, at 27-38.

> Between the specters of Emma Mae Martin [Thomas' sister]—denounced by Thomas as an example of "welfare dependency" (read: welfare queen)—on the one hand, and Anita Hill—embodiment of black-lady status—on the other hand, the confirmation of Thomas could be viewed as necessary to help save the life of the nation, which might otherwise go down the tubes trying to fight the pathology of the urban black poor dragging at its heels.[158]

Such invocations of the Welfare Queen myth make it easy to see why critics of such rhetoric view the use of this language as race-baiting and potentially class warfare—the class and race status of the Welfare Queen stereotype cannot be separated from her "dependent" status as a recipient of government assistance.

As a testament to how universally loathed the Welfare Queen is in American society, this mythical mother is also frequently invoked by welfare recipients themselves, primarily as a way to demonstrate their own worthiness in contrast to the unworthy Welfare Queen. For example, research has shown that some teen welfare mothers "readily reproduced existing stereotypes of lone mothers (but not themselves) becoming pregnant for instrumental reasons."[159] In *Not Our Kind of Girl*, Elaine Kaplan also found that several caseworkers believed that welfare mothers often were "too lazy to work" and had no real work ethic.[160] The fact that many welfare recipients express the same moral outrage at the manipulative, lazy Welfare Queen as the general public is further evidence of how entrenched this myth is in American culture. This somewhat counterintuitive finding—that the mothers most likely to refute the myth of the Welfare Queen based on their own contradictory personal experiences believe the stereotype themselves—also indicates the reach of the current hegemonic motherhood ideal.

Much like other working mothers, mothers receiving public assistance also appear to believe that the full-time stay-at-home mother is still the best mother.[161] The irony here is that while middle class and wealthier Soccer Moms are praised for "staying home," welfare mothers are severely criticized for "sitting home all day." As noted above, lower-income and minority mothers are constructed as workers before mothers. Thus, the welfare mother is automatically labeled deviant because she does not work full time; the paid labor of single welfare mothers is perceived to have far greater societal value than their unpaid work as mothers. Some mothers on welfare, however, view public assistance as a way to temporarily meet the stay-at-home maternal ideal despite the welfare stigma: "I wanted to spend the first two years at home . . . That's the way I was raised. My mother didn't work until we were in school."[162] The campaign by parenting gurus and proponents of attachment theory urging middle class mothers to stay

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158 Lubiano, *supra* note 141, at 336.
159 Phoenix, *supra* note 143, at 180.
160 KAPLAN, *supra* note 149, at 133.
161 *See* CHIRA, *supra* note 33, at 214-16.
162 *Id.* at 215 (quoting Theresa Covington, welfare recipient).

home with their young children appears to have trickled down to impoverished mothers as well.

The disconnect between the stay-at-home maternal ideal and the day-to-day realities for mothers receiving welfare, however, is especially troubling for this group of mothers, who are struggling with basic material needs while attempting to be "good mothers." In a 1983 hearing on the "feminization of poverty" in Northern California, for example, a welfare recipient perceptively exclaimed:

> I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't. In other words, if I stay home and care for my children I'm accused of freeloading, but if I work I not only face economic sanctions but a society that tells me I'm a bad mother for abandoning my children to child care and neglecting my responsibility.[163]

This mother's testimony poignantly demonstrates the enduring tensions between motherhood and work that continue to plague all American mothers.

Although "deviant" mothers such as single welfare mothers, minority mothers, or low-income working mothers are not readily discussed in the context of the Mommy Wars over the construction of the maternal ideal, they are important players in this ideological battle. Moreover, based on Schneider and Ingram's target population construction model, they are a positive construction away from becoming political "contenders."[164] In this way, understanding the content of these different maternal stereotypes provides important information about how target populations compete for social policy benefits. A 2002 study on how the Welfare Queen and Soccer Mom stereotypes are used in transportation policy debates confirms the importance of these socio-political constructions in the policymaking process.[165]

The maternal stereotypes explored in this study then, are "not simply social taxonomies, they are also recognized by the national public as stories that describe the world in particular and politically loaded ways—and that is exactly why they are constructed, reconstructed, manipulated, and contested."[166] In the context of contemporary child care debates, the Mommy Wars between all four maternal stereotypes explored here provide the political battleground for competing stories of the ideal mother.

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163   Elaine Zimmerman, *California Hearings on the Feminization of Poverty*, 10 SIGNS 394, 401 (1983).

164   Schneider & Ingram, *supra* note 12, at 338 (defining "contenders" as "powerful but negatively viewed groups" that "have sufficient control to blunt the imposition of burdens but not enough power to gain much in terms of visible benefits").

165   Hank Dittmar, *From Wooing Soccer Moms and Demonizing Welfare Mothers: A Legislative Context for Women's Travel*, *in* 35 SURFACE TRANSP. POL'Y PROJECT, WASH. DC 667, 667-672 (2000), http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/womens/chap35.pdf.
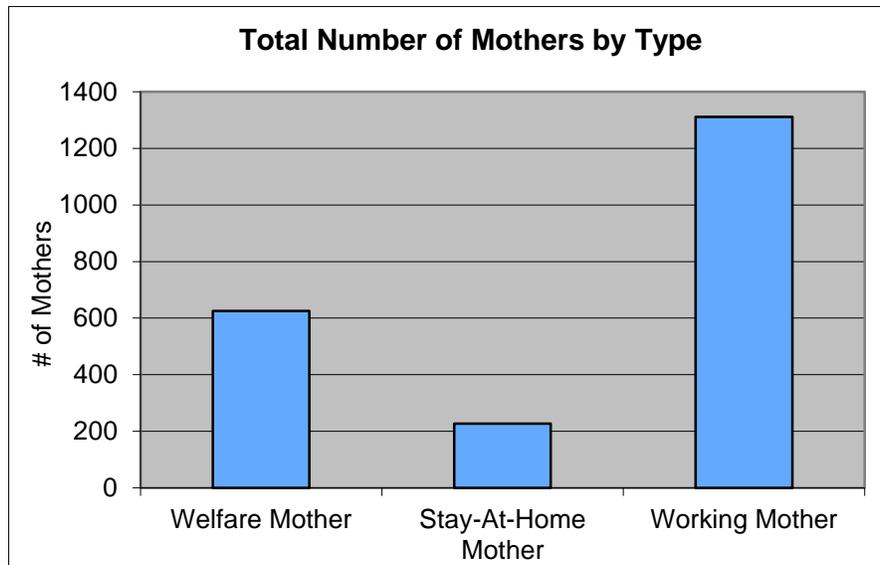
166   Lubiano, *supra* note 141, at 330.

III. ANALYZING MEDIA CONSTRUCTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD

Using the well-developed theoretical literature on maternal myths as a foundation, I conducted an extensive content analysis of state-level newspaper stories and television broadcast transcripts that discussed motherhood in the context of child care. I selected, sampled, coded, and analyzed over 1500 stories from media outlets in sixteen different states that were chosen with geographic and socio-political diversity in mind. The content analysis was done over a four-year time period, from 1993 until 1996, when a major piece of federal child care legislation, the Child Care Development Fund Block Grant program, was enacted.[167] An extensive coding scheme was developed to systematically assess how state media presented different dimensions of motherhood and child care.

The mothers discussed in the articles on child care were, not surprisingly, most likely to be working mothers, with a total of 1311 working mothers mentioned (See Figure 5). About half that number (625) were mothers participating in welfare programs, with stay-at-home mothers mentioned only 227 times in the sampled articles. To some extent, these findings reflect the perceived demand for child care, as mothers who work or who are moving from welfare to work must find reliable child care arrangements to meet their professional obligations. Rather than a necessity, non-parental child care for stay-at-home mothers is typically perceived to be a helpful respite for full-time mothers through programs such as "Mother's Day Out", enrichment programs, and summer camps. Thus, it is not surprising that the child care articles were most likely to include working mothers and welfare mothers in their discussions of this issue.

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167 This time period was chosen for methodological reasons beyond the scope of this article. The broader research project that this working paper is a part of includes an analysis of how these 1993–1996 media constructions of maternal myths affect the design, enactment, and implementation of state-level child care policies from 1997–2000.

Figure 5. Frequency of Different Types of Mothers

Total Number of Mothers by Type

# of Mothers

Welfare Mother — approximately 620
Stay-At-Home Mother — approximately 230
Working Mother — approximately 1310

What is surprising, however, is that the discussions of working mothers were overwhelmingly positive. Based on both theoretical and opinion poll findings about maternal employment during this time period, we would expect to find fairly mixed opinions about working mothers in these news stories. Instead, the vast majority of working mothers (73%) were constructed as a positive target population in the context of child care debates (See Figure 6). In fact, working mothers were slightly more likely to be constructed positively than stay-at-home mothers who embody the reigning maternal ideal. Though, only 62% of stay-at-home mothers were discussed in a positive light, they were still clearly a positively-constructed target group.

Welfare mothers, however, elicited decidedly mixed opinions. The proportion of positive, negative, and neutral images was nearly equal for mothers receiving welfare, which confirms the media's continued unease with this group. While these media outlets made some headway in reducing unnecessarily negative portrayals of working mothers, the same cannot be said for their often unfounded negative portrayals of welfare mothers.

Figure 6. Media Constructions of Motherhood

Proportion of Positive, Negative, & Neutral Constructions of Motherhood
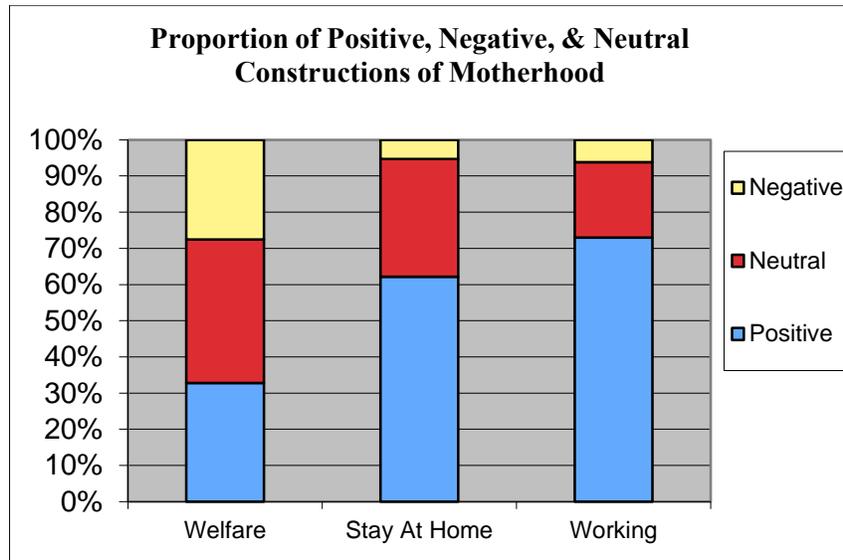
Based on previous research on media portrayals of welfare recipients, we would expect that the high number of negative welfare mother images could be at least partially attributed to racial discrimination.[168] Interestingly, race was all but invisible in the text of the news stories analyzed in this study. In fact, the race of the mother was mentioned in only 37 out of the 2590 total child care articles. This does not mean, however, that racial undertones were entirely absent from the child care articles. It is important to note that when Gilens conducted his groundbreaking research for his book *Why Americans Hate Welfare,* he focused his analysis on the photographic images of welfare recipients that were printed with news magazine stories on welfare and poverty.[169] He found that these images were disproportionately of African Americans even though the majority of welfare recipients throughout his historical analysis were white.[170] Thus, a purely textual analysis of stories about welfare recipients, or motherhood and child care, is likely to miss the racial cues that are typically made more explicit in media images.

The class status of the mothers in this content analysis, however, proved much more salient than their race; class status could be determined for almost half of all the mothers mentioned in the media stories. Stay-at-home mothers were much more likely to be middle class than working mothers, who were most likely to fall into the lower income category (See Figure 7). In fact, over 40% of all working mothers mentioned in the news

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168   GILENS, *supra* note 133, at 113.
169   *Id.*
170   *Id.*

stories could be classified as low-income or working poor. Stay-at-home mothers, on the other hand, were overwhelmingly middle class, with over 70% of full-time mothers falling into the middle and upper-middle class categories. These findings provide support for the claim (made in both a 1993 *Wall Street Journal* article and in a 1998 issue of the *New York Times Magazine*) that the full-time, stay-at-home mother has become the new status symbol for middle and upper-middle class families, and an unattainable luxury for most lower income families.[171]

**Figure 7.** Class Status of Working and Stay-at-Home Mothers
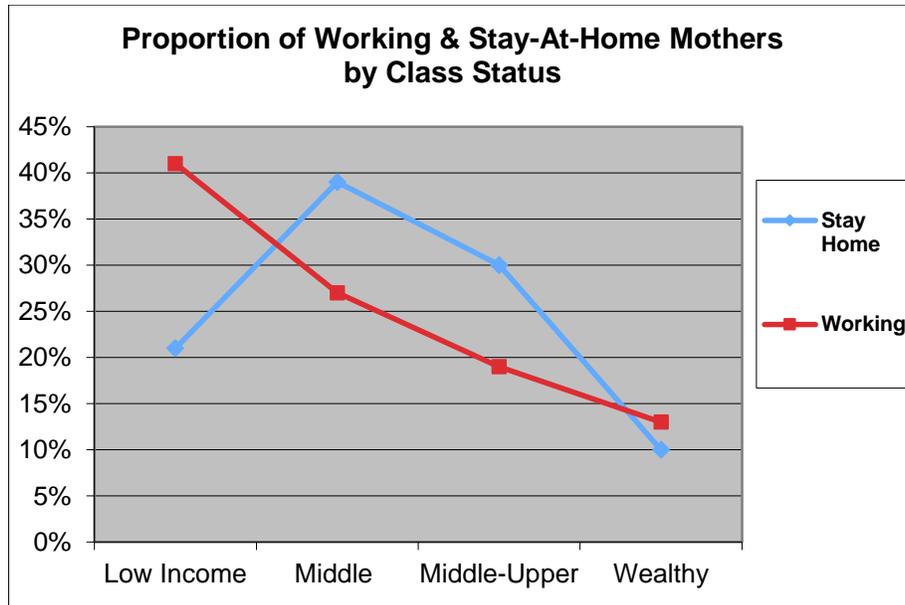
Because lower-income working mothers were the most frequently mentioned type of mother in the articles analyzed here, it is not surprising that the most frequent maternal myth invoked was that of the Waitress Mom (See Figure 8). The Waitress Mom was followed closely by the Welfare Queen stereotype, then the Super Mom, and, finally, the Soccer Mom as the least common maternal myth in the child care-oriented stories. The minimal references to the Soccer Mom myth may be at least partially attributable to the time frame of this content analysis, which ends in 1996—just as this new construction of motherhood was gaining broader cultural resonance. While this same logic would seem to follow for the Waitress Mom (which emerged as a linguistic label in 1998), the low-income working mother image—though without the catchy Waitress Mom label—has been a part of American culture for a much longer time period

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171   Swasy, *supra* note 96; Mosle, *supra* note 96.

than the Soccer Mom. The Soccer Mom, in contrast, represents a more recent and significant reconceptualization of motherhood by transforming the 1950s-style June Cleaver stay-home mother into the minivan-driving, child-centered, full-time mother. Working mothers who fit the Waitress Mom stereotype—working one or two low-paying jobs to support her family financially, possibly single, usually white, etc.—however, have been represented in the media for a much longer period of time. Although the content analysis methodology used here did not require an explicit mention of the actual words "Waitress Mom" or "Soccer Mom," but rather, required explicit mentions of the specific qualities associated with these stereotypes, the results of this analysis do clearly show that stories on child care were most likely to be linked with the Waitress Mom maternal stereotype.

Figure 8. Myths of Motherhood in the Media
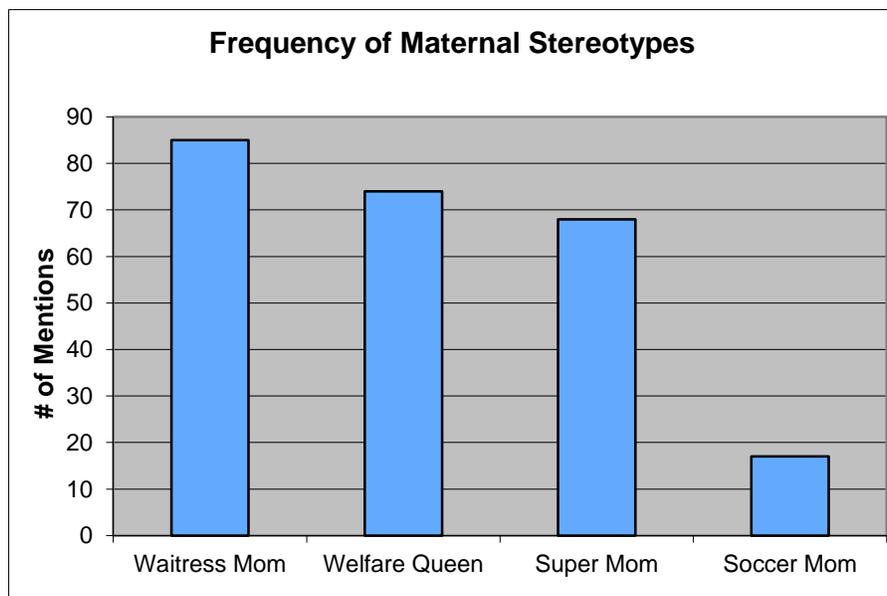
It is also worth exploring why the Welfare Queen stereotype was the second most frequent maternal myth despite the fact that welfare recipients were mentioned half as often as working mothers overall. If we look more closely at the proportion of each type of mother that was associated with a maternal myth, it becomes clear that welfare mothers were significantly more likely to be stereotyped than the other groups of mothers. As Figure 9 demonstrates, approximately 12% of all mothers receiving welfare were labeled with the derogatory Welfare Queen stereotype, while the other groups of mothers were less subject to either negative or positive generalizations.

Figure 9. Media Stereotyping for Each Type of Mother

Likelihood of Maternal Stereotyping for Each Type of Mother
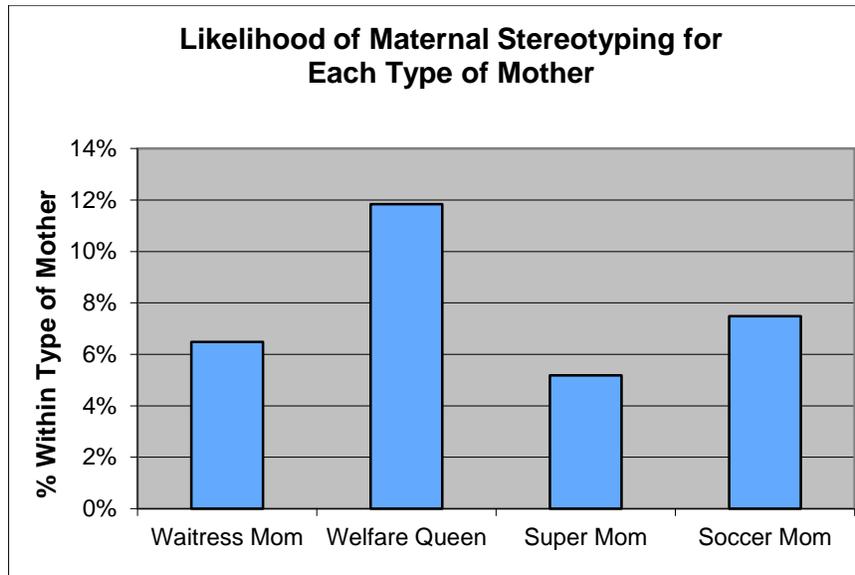
In addition to being negatively stereotyped more frequently than the other subgroups of mothers included in this analysis, welfare mothers were also more likely to be labeled with other derogatory descriptors. As Figure 10 shows, welfare mothers were much more likely than working mothers to be identified as single, as teenagers, and as "unwed" mothers.[172] Given the clear negative implications of these adjectives as outlined in the scholarly literature reviewed above, these findings provide additional evidence that state media sources continue to view mothers receiving welfare as "deviant."

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172   Teen mothers attending school full-time and not receiving welfare were coded as working mothers in this analysis in accordance with the U.S. Department of Labor's definition of employment, which includes full-time students.

Figure 10. Negative Adjectives Describing Welfare and Working Mothers
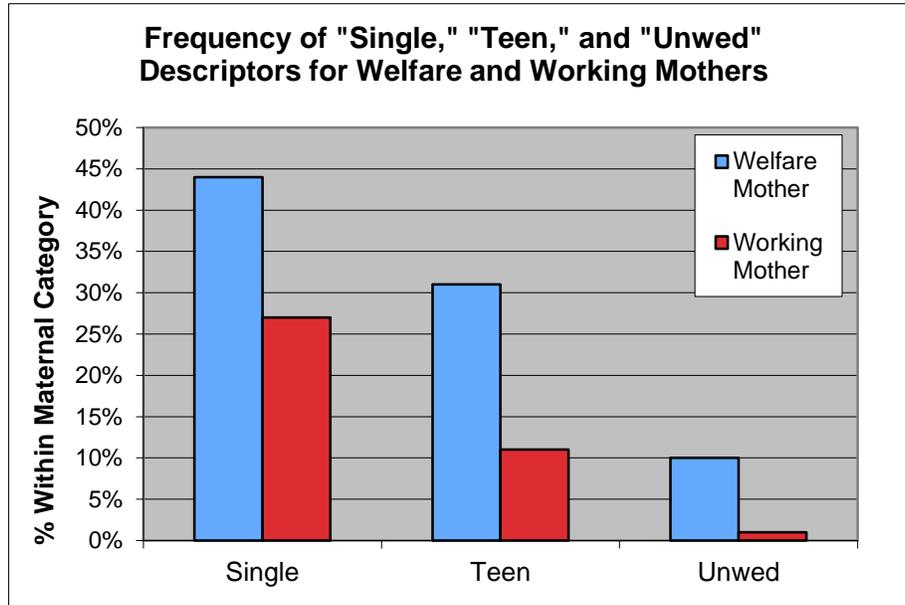
IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of this content analysis directly confront many of the theoretical claims about motherhood that are reviewed extensively above. The conflicting and often overly negative portrayals of welfare mothers in this media analysis during the 1990s reinforce theoretical assertions that welfare recipients are much more likely than other types of mothers to be constructed as deviant by the media. Mothers receiving welfare were more likely to be stereotyped as Welfare Queens and to be linked with the similarly pejorative labels of single, teen, and unwed. This analysis also confirms that stay-at-home mothers are most frequently presented in a positive light by both print and television media. However, it should be noted that Soccer Moms were mentioned much less frequently than all other types of mothers.

The portrayals of working mothers, in contrast, do not fit as readily with theoretical assumptions about maternal hierarchies and the reigning "ideal mother." Based on the theoretical literature and contemporary opinion polls, we would expect media images of working mothers (both Waitress Moms and Super Moms) to be somewhat mixed, thereby reflecting the documented cultural discord concerning motherhood and employment as evidenced by the persistence of the ongoing Mommy Wars. The child care focused media stories analyzed in this research, however, present an overwhelmingly positive view of working mothers regardless of their class status. Thus, both working and stay-at-home mothers are

constructed as positive maternal ideals in the context of state-level child care debates in this analysis. One interpretation of this somewhat surprising finding is that the state news outlets recognized that the majority of their maternal readership was likely to be working outside the home and they took pains to avoid alienating their customers. While this apparent media endorsement of working mothers is certainly an important first step toward gaining greater overall cultural acceptance for the majority of American mothers, a more significant indication of progress would be child care policies that directly support all working mothers and their families regardless of race, class, and employment status.